Who taught toby about the chakras?

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Introduction

This semester[1], I have learned about the theoretical meanings and experiential realities of the seven chakras. Not only have I attempted to interpret/experience my dreams and current events with this conceptual framework/mode of being, I have explored the reinterpretation of knowledges and experiences from my past. Below, I explore particularly compelling episodes from this tantric sojourn that were instrumental in the formation of my understanding of the chakras.

For each chakra, I will provide an admittingly partial – yet certainly essential – definition. Then, I will tell a story and explain how this story relates to the respective chakra. The purpose of the stories/analyses is two fold: (1) they convey my understanding and experience of the chakra and (2) they introduce the people/experiences that have taught me a significant amount about the chakra (even if I was unaware that the people/experiences were transmitting such knowledge at the time). Hence the title of this work.

[1] This piece was my final project for a seminar that I took with Rick Jarow on tantric Hinduism during the fall of 2012.

The root chakra - muladhara (1st chakra)

Definition

Grounded, earth energy. 'Let's first take care of the first chakra stuff. When do people want to meet to do final presentations?' -Jarow

Meet the teacher

"Come on, Carmel" my father, Loredo exclaims. Carmel is a dual citizen, Israeli/American cousin of mine who lived with my family in rural Vermont for three years in order to avoid the Israeli military draft and, as he is exceptionally bright, take advantage of a relatively high quality American high school education. Every morning, Laredo drives me, Carmel, and my older brother, Tista to school. Like most mornings, we are running late.

Once we are all finally in the car, we take off down the road. No more than 15 seconds into our commute, however, we come upon a cow standing peacefully in the middle of the road, blocking our way. "Oh shit" says Tista. You see, it would be one thing if this cow isn't our problem, but……it is.

During the summer months, Miller Hewitt, a local farmer and butcher, lets our family take care of 10 or so of his cows. This arrangement works out well for everyone involved: Miller simply picks up the cows at the end of the summer and sells the meat without having to do much at all. As our pasture is very healthy, he often says that the cows that spend the summer at Happy Valley Farm (the inherited name of the family estate) are some of the plumpest in his herd. We get our pasture

'mowed' by the herd (which successfully staves of forest succession), some free meat from Miller, to enjoy the company of some of the chillest and prettiest animals on the planet (their goddesses in India, remember), and, we mustn't forget, the cow's poop makes the grass quite happy as well.

I guess there is one 'downside' to having the cows at our farm. Sometimes they break out of our admittingly feeble fencing. This is exactly what has occurred on this already rushed school morning.

Loredo puts the car in park and says with inspiring matter-of-factness "well, looks like we're gonna be even more late. Toby, you get on the other side of the road, Tista and I are gonna circle 'round through the woods and push the herd up towards the gate. Carmel, wanna go shut the fence off so we can open the gate?"

I'm totally frustrated. 'This means I'm gonna miss most of my geometry class, which means I may not understand the homework, and I'll have to meet with the teacher in order to…' I jabber to my self. So unacceptable, so fucking annoying. However, I rally motivation, exit the car, and assume my position on the other side of the road where I will be responsible for making sure the cows don't simply walk up the road, past the open gate. After a few minutes of maneuvering, we are all in our positions and the fine art of convincing a herd to move where you want it to go begins. Tista and Loredo walk slowly up the road, clapping their hands and waving their arms in order to mildly scare the cows and get them to move toward the gate. The cows respond with "moos", rapid eye movement, quick juts to the left and right, and finally, a steady trot up the road. I successfully ensure the cows enter the gate. As this is the most exciting thing that will happen to the cows all day, they simply

cannot control their enthusiasm and begin stampeding in circles within the paddock. Tista then closes the gate, Carmel turns the fence back on, and we drive off once again.

As I continue to contemplate the negative repercussions of the morning's events, my face is engraved with a frown. However, Loredo interjects, "don't ya just love shit like that? Life always seems to throw little adventures at you when you least expect it. They great! They spice stuff up a bit, keep ya on your toes, I love em."

I was hit blind-sided. I simply didn't have the emotional energy to see the morning's events as anything but bothersome. Luckily, my father illuminated some of his tantric understandings in later conversations. He more or less said,

The little adventures that life throws at you aren't only fun, more importantly, they remind you of subtle, oft-overlooked circumstances that enable your existence. Most days we don't think about the importance of the cows being in the pasture and how much this simple consistency eases our lives; we take the cow's locality for granted. But imagine if the cows didn't stick around. What would we tell Miller? Where would we get our meat? As food is one of life's necessities, our cows sticking around - and similarly simple realities - enable us to do everything from brush our teeth to think up solutions to global warming. If you can manage to make such connections, keeping the cows in the pasture ceases to be an annoyance and instead becomes a holy act, as important as the highest of holidays. Keeping the cows in the pasture, stacking your wood, and fixing a leaky faucet are absolutely necessary and

therefore divine acts that one should feel blessed to partake in.

My father has taught me that god not only resides in holy ritual and passionate love, but also in the location of your herd. Thank you, father for showing me the importance of the Root Chakra.

The polarity chakra - svadhisthana (2nd chakra)

Definition

Shadow side.

Meet the Teachers

Growing up, I spent about as much time at the Hubert's (fake name) house as I did at my own house. Two of my best friends, Manse Hubert and Gabe Hubert (again, fake names) lived there, it was about two miles from my house (so walking or riding my bike over was always an option), their parents cooked massive gourmet dinners *every night,* they had a warm pond, cute dogs, and all of my other best friends essentially resided there as well. Together, we spent our childhoods climbing trees, driving go-carts, sledding, playing football, getting stoned, drinking our parents liquor, and embarking on overnight treks dressed as Lord of the Rings characters. We not only got along, we thought of each other as brothers.

Yet my relationships with Manse and Gabe have shifted dramatically in recent years. As we've grown, our ideas of a 'fun time' and our senses of morality have diverged substantially. While we once enjoyed the kind of activities listed above, now all they want to do is smoke weed, play video games, watch tv, get drunk, break shit, yell, and go to strip clubs. On the other hand, all I want to do is meditate, play music, go on walks, talk about interesting and deeply meaningful ideas, and stay the fuck away from strip clubs.

I dream about the Hubert's in one-way or another every two or three weeks.

Guess the context. In deed, I'm furious at Manse for breaking my favorite mug, pissed at Gabe for leaving gigantic ruts in my lawn after driving his truck through it, or outraged at the Hubert's father for being a sloppy, useless drunkard. Upon awakening, I am surprised with the intensity of my fury. This makes me wonder whether such emotions are solely driven by the situations them selves. Are some of my own insecurities surfacing during these dreams as well? Do Hubert dreams bring me face-to-face with my own *shadow side*? How long can I successfully externalize my shadow onto Manse and Gabe? How long can I continue to believe that there is no Hubert within me? For much of life, I thought I could do so forever.

Then I got super drunk one night and felt the ecstasy of shattering glass, the euphoria that accompanies intolerance, and the jubilance of impulsive, irresponsible behavior. 'Wow,' I said to myself the next morning, 'what the hell happened last night? You would hate Toby if you met him last night, what were you thinking? Were you thinking?' The answer is no, I wasn't thinking. My actions were inspired by group dynamics, beers, and my actions weren't, in any way, curbed by a sense of morality or wisdom. 'But fuck it,' I continued to myself, 'it was hilarious and fun. There was a twisted beauty of improvisation, expression, and genuine freedom buried in my night of debauchery. I'm damn sure I never want to act that way ever again, but I can see why the Huberts dig it.'

My night of debauchery revealed to me that a Hubert seed resides within me. Now, here's the important part: what do I *do* with this seed? Tantra certainly doesn't teach us to be eternally enslaved by inner demons, forever subject to the ways in which they can skew action toward apathetic and hateful ends. Yet tantra

does encourage us to be open to such demons, to not deny their existence, and, eventually, explore them with child-like curiosity and motherly compassion. While we may not consciously agree with our shadows, we should nonetheless get to know them. For when we know our shadows well, when we do not deny their important existence, we can choose whether or not to let them guide our actions.

Thank you oh Hubert family and night of debauchery for exposing me to the inarguable reality and importance of the shadow.

The solar plexus chakra - manipura (3rd chakra)

Definition

Emotional fire.

Meet the teacher

I am having a rough day. Not only is my chronic pain flaring up and I have the flu, I am *girl crazy*. Girl crazy is a serious, short-term psychopathology that wreaks havoc on your entire being. Causes include going for the kiss when the girl isn't feeling it, date rejections, delayed responses to text messages (why hasn't she answered?! Does she hate me?!), and worst of all, subtle looks, lines, and mannerisms that convey lack of interest. Symptoms include intense, uncomfortable emotional body sensation (often located in the upper abdomen), hectic and stressful thoughts, regret, and a decrease in one's concentration power and smiling ability. Yeah, good luck writing a paper, having fun with friends, sleeping well, or enjoying the weather while being abdomen deep in anxious hell. Like I said, it wreaks havoc on your entire being. Does it have to though?

On this girl crazy-defined day, I am sitting in Jarow's Tantric Hinduism seminar trying desperately to make peace with a Toby who had, just the night before, unsuccessfully invited his latest crush to sleep over (which, as we all know, is a great interaction from which to build a deep, loving relationship). My mind is spinning and my body aches from chronic pain, an acute illness, and worst of all, girl crazy. 'Wow,' I say to myself 'life pretty much sucks right now doesn't it? You're being

eaten by overwhelming physical and emotion pain…..' Seemingly out of nowhere, a couple of Shinzen Young's powerful and inspiring ideas pop into to my throbbing head.

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Life as monastery

The main reason that you go to a Zen monastery is to sit all day (which makes your knees hurt and your mind antsy), live without heat (which makes the winters cold), live without screens (which makes the summers full of bug bites), and never see woman (which makes your dick hurt). Why in the hell would Zen monks design such a torture camp? They figured out something incredible about the human psyche: add a tablespoon of equanimity lectures to our torture camp experience and our psyche not only learns to survive such intense discomfort, it directly perceives the manifestation of ultimate reality *with in* the discomfort. That doesn't sound too bad! In fact, that's probably the most fascinating and useful training I've ever heard of, I'll make sure to make it to Japan someday.

Fuck that, do it now. Think of your suburban home as a monastery and use your everyday, modern-ass discomforts as the powerful forces of purification that they truly are. Both welcoming the anxiety that accompanies your boss's unreasonable criticism and greeting your antsy mind with equanimity are absolutely functional ways to purifies one's consciousness. Let your modern-ass problems return you to your original face.

Damn, all right girl crazy, looks like its time to let you remove my sanskaras.
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Focusing on physical sound is a great meditation to do while in class because you don't miss anything the professor says and you get to meditate for hours on end!

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I zero in on Jarow's voice, letting my awareness soak it up like as a dry sponge soaks up water. Before I know it, the suffering caused by girl crazy and sickness evaporates; both voice and pain begin to massage my now ecstatic being. Waves of sound and anxiety taste delicious as they coarse through my awareness.

Most people would describe my original painful situation as hellish. Yet because I applied focus and equanimity to my experience, a hellish reality turned into a euphoric torrent of dancing - and purifying - energies. Kinda epitomizes 'make the most of every situation,' doesn't it? I don't have to wait for a Zendo, girl crazy works pretty damn well too.

Thanks you oh crush for teaching me about the transformative power of emotional fire.
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The heart chakra - anahata (4th chakra)

Definition

True love.

Meet the teachers

About a third of the time I spend meditating is spent doing 'nurture positive' exercises. In these exercises, you actively cultivate positive states such as compassion or love, focus on mental images of positive situations such as your friend graduating college, embody a positive change in personal behavior such as quitting cigarettes, or enjoy any manner of other positive realities.

When I first began doing nurture positive exercises, I was working as a volunteer ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher in Burlington, VT. My students were mostly refugees from Nepal and Bhurma, though I had a few from Somalia. Ages ranged from 18 to 72 and skill levels went from barely being able to say, "hello, my name is Puspa. What is your name?" to semi-fluency. Needless to say, teaching English was at least as challenging as my college education.

At first the meditations and the teaching remained separate activities. I would teach my English class, and then go home to do a nurture positive or other meditation. Then one day, while my class was going exceptionally well (my students were laughing and learning, imagine!!), I noticed an effortless, embodied visualization of compassionate energy welling up from my bodily core and drenching the entire room in warm hugs. I wasn't only teaching them their ABC's, I

was actively meditating on my deep love for them and my complete faith in their ability to learn. I was stunned. I think my students were stunned as well, as they read all this off my smile.

This was my first experience of true love. And I'm not talking about love at first sight, butterflies in your stomach, or heart throbbing; all that's all third chakra shit. This was Toby-less love. That's right, I wasn't even there. My body and mind solely acted as a portal through which waves of compassion flowed, illuminating the smiling faces of my students. 'Wow' I said to myself, 'this meditation shit works.' What does meditation do, you might ask?

Lot's of social workers feel over worked and therefore burn out soon after entering their seemingly exciting and apparently rewarding careers. Does it sound like I was about to storm out of the classroom, utterly frustrated by challenging students? Hells no. Engaging a nurture positive meditation while teaching completely removed any sentiment of 'work' from my experience and replaced it with a fascinating flow of love; a purifying orgasm of consciousness.

This experience transformed my understanding of compassion. I no longer understand compassion as simply something that is 'right' to do; that I 'should' do. I now think of opportunities to be compassionate as exciting chances to enjoy a wave of warm love flowing from my core out into the world. When someone drops their water bottle, I look forward to picking it up for them and placing it back in their bag. Toby isn't there, just a welling up of love.

This experience has also transformed my approach to and attitude about teaching. While I am no longer teaching English, I teach three mindfulness

meditation classes a week and help countless friends and family through difficult times using intellectual insights from the Buddhist tradition and custom-made guided meditations. This teaching is not experienced as work, but as deeply satisfying nurture positive meditations, as currents of effortless sunshine.

I extend endless gratitude toward Puspa Dahal, Agi Dahal, Ambika Dahal, Gotame Dahal, Sita Paudel, Rupa Paudel, Tila Adikari, Chula Adikari, Khibu Adihikari, Krishna Misra, Nir Gurung, Durga Magar, Gyi Gyi Htay, Chaw Toe, A Sa Bi, Ar Min Lay, Pabitra Magar, Man Gurung, Abdur Asi, Sher Pokwal, Lila Pokwal, Pabitra Khatiwada, Bishnu Khatiwada, Zawadi Sifa, Chandra Khatiwada, Omar Abdullah Adam, Halima Ibrahim, Yani Dhamala, Hung Yo, Mon Maya Rai, Thaw Theet Paw, Bwe Wah, and Jag Pai. Thank you for teaching me about the power and bliss of true love.

The throat chakra - vishuddhi (5th chakra)

Definition

Creativity.

Meet the teacher

Throughout my life, the creative process has put me in direct contact with the divine. One of the reasons that I homeschooled my self for a year-and-a-half during high school was so I could practice playing the drums more often. Both during and after intense practice or playing music with friends, I felt a genuine and pure happiness and a powerful flow of energy, what I would now call the Kundalini.

Over the past few days I recorded the seven-track CD available for streaming and download at:

https://soundcloud.com/sola-tido

Each track corresponds to a chakra in the following ways:

SOLA (tido) by Toby Sola

Doom Doom 7:07

Root chakra – grounded, earthly – absolutely everyone wants to shake their booty when they hear the drum.

Vincent 7:28

Polarity chakra – shadow side – hear the beauty in Jame's death. Perter Thompson,

song writing.

80! 3:00

Solar Plexus chakra – fiery emotion – emotions rev like a car's engine.

Bengali Gali :

Heart chakra – true love – hear the smile in a south African chorus. Ashley Powel, poetry.

Creative Answers 2:18

Throat chakra – creativity – enjoy rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic creativity.

Down to the River 5:52

Third eye – merging – through prayer, become one with the river. A traditional hymn, Allison Kraus's arrangement.

Superville 0:54

Crown chakra – non-duality – an incomprehensible maelstrom that paradoxically conveys a simple, divine sentiment. Lyrics by Superville (an Argentinian musician).

During the writing, remixing, and recording of SOLA (tido), I certainly experienced profound flows of Kundalini energy. This energy fills me with inspiration and a sense of honesty that I then bring into the world. Thank you oh awesome music for teaching about the throat chakra.

The third eye - ajna (6th chakra)

Definition

Merging.

Meet the teacher

Throughout my childhood, I would enter the beautiful woods that surround my rural Vermont home as if I was entering a cathedral. Each step was a blessing, the wind sung hymns, sunsets appeared as stain glass, maple trees resembled gothic marble pillars, and warm gusts enveloped me in prayer shawls. Sitting or laying down in the leaves and simply watching, listening, and feeling my surroundings was a favorite part of the service. I would look up into the trees as if I was looking at an impressionist painting, enjoy the feeling of wind against my skin as if I was getting a massage, and I would listen to the birds as if they were playing Mozart.

One night, as one of the first snows of the winter fell, I bundled up and set out to explore my cathedral. As I was feeling calm, I decided to lie in the freshly fallen snow and enjoy the magical evening. As I lay there, snowflakes began pelting my face and I became quite perturbed by the tickly, itchy sensations that such bombardment produced. I had a strong urge to wipe my face and stand up (a position that would, at least, reduce the number of snowflakes assaulting my face). I then remembered one of Tom Brown Jr.'s stories.

Tom teaches workshops on Native American survival skills, awareness, and tracking at his school in New Jersey and is arguably the best tracker alive today

(police often recruit him to find missing children and he's known for being able to track a mouse across bare rock). Tom and his childhood friend, Rick honed their skills under the tutelage of Grandfather, an Apache medicine man and scout. One day, during a similarly snowy day in the Pine Barrens, Grandfather was teaching Tom and Rick about the importance of being open to discomfort (however, as Grandfather was an avid *coyote teacher*, Tom and Rick knew nothing of his intention). All they knew was that Grandfather had them floating down a forest stream in the middle of a New Jersey winter. While they compulsively shivered, Grandfather suggested that they open up to the cold, to not resist it, but instead, to let it flow throughout their bodies as divine breath. Tom and Rick desperately tried to achieve such a shift in perspective and eventually succeeded. The cold began caressing their beings and shivers ceased.

With this story in mind, I was determined to achieve a similar shift in perspective with regard to these damned snowflakes. I locked my body into position, not allowing even a flinch of movement. I took deep breaths in order to 'pump my self up' and help myself survive the tickling that accompanied the falling flakes. After realizing that I had sustained this for about 30 seconds, I became more confident in my ability to persevere, which allowed me to mildly relax. I began to think of Grandfather's teaching and I attempted to engage a calm and sincere openness. Every once in a while, a snowflake wouldn't cause much of a tickling sensation and this further increased conviction. Eventually, the itching sensations that accompanied the pelting faded into the background and I was left with a wild energetic face kneading. Soon, even this sensation grew dim, and I began to feel

fingers of my awareness stretch out into the woods around me. The whole of the woods seemed as much a part of my being as my thoughts and feelings. I could sense the movement of limbs, winds, and water that were obviously beyond the scope my physical senses. Merging, oneness.

As I arose from the snow that evening I continued to feel viscerally connected to my surroundings. I wasn't standing in 'the woods,' I was standing in an over flowing emptiness of spirit. When a tree limb swayed during gusts of wind, I was swaying. When the moon shone on the freshly fallen snow, I was sparkling. A lone thought bounced around a vacuous consciousness, "the spirit-that-moves-in-all-things is no fairytale."

Thank you oh glorious snowflakes for helping me to merge with my surroundings. This experience radically transformed my understanding of self and world and has thus greatly influenced my life's trajectory in countless ways.

The crown chakra - sahasrara (7th chakra)

Definition

Non-duality.

Meet the teacher

"Stealing can be a holy act, but you've got to be real good…" – Jarow

Throughout this semester, I have experimented with the use of a seventh chakra perspective, a non-dual perspective. Not only have I attempted to greet current events with such a lens, I have explored the reinterpretation of past events in a seventh chakra light. The stories above can be viewed as a few examples of such greeting/reinterpretation (as they all evidence a perception of the holy within things that most people would certainly consider unholy/annoying):

Root chakra (grounded) – Seeing the divine in keeping the cows in their pasture.

Polarity chakra (shadow side) – Seeing the divine in my own shadow side and my friend's shadow side.

Solar plexus chakra (emotional fire) – Seeing the divine in the discomfort of fiery emotion.

Heart chakra (true love)– Seeing the divine in your work.

Throat chakra (creativity) – Seeing the divine in the tedious process of writing, recording, and remixing musical pieces.

Third eye (merging) – Seeing the divine in no-self/true-self.

Thank you, Jarow for inspiring me to seriously explore such terrain. While the terrain seems alien and scary, the local fruits taste of deep happiness and wisdom.